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NSC BRIEFING

6 May 1954

INDOCHINA MILITARY SITUATION

I. Third phase Viet Minh assaults Dien

Bien Phu began night 1-2 May.

A. 10 to 12 battalions hit French positions main complex and Isabelle.

B. Overwhelmed six positions.

C. Altogether, Eliane Haut 3, Eliane Bas 1 and 2, Huguette 4 and 5, and Isabelle 5 were lost.

D. French counterattacked. At end 2 May, had retaken Eliane Bas 2, Huguette 4 and Isabelle 5.

E. Isabelle 5, however, totally destroyed. Only listening posts could be established.

State Department
review completed

NSA, DIA reviews
completed

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F. Lull in activity followed, but assaults began again on night 3-4 May.

1. Four enemy battalions retook Huguette 4.

II. Intensity fight illustrated by casualties.

A. French losses up to two battalions.

III. Viet Minh seem still determined take garrison.

B. Enemy supplies probably adequate.

25X1

IV. French have touch-and-go supply situation, understrength units.

A. Weather and constantly dwindling drop area makes supply unpredictable. On 2 May, French dropped 130 tons; 40 percent lost.

B. Book value French garrison 11 battalions, but each down from normal 800 strength to between 200 and 300. Effective strength no more than 3,500, compared with 14,000 on 13 March.

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C. French now reinforcing with a
French paratroop battalion; 109
dropped main positions night 2-3
May, another 128 next night.

D. Garrison reported exhausted,
however.

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VI.

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- A. This force battle weary, but would pose big threat French delta control.
- B. French already sorely pressed by infiltrated enemy, must keep limited mobile reserves hopping. Viet Minh may now have capability permanently cutting Hanoi-Haiphong communications.

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D. Dismal prospect this: after Dien Bien Phu enemy can in several weeks reinforce delta area heavily; French will find delta reinforcement more difficult. Meantime, enemy strengthens hold delta populace, expands bases there. Gets ready for big push in fall, perhaps sooner (opinion U.S. Consul Sturm just returned Hanoi).

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VII. In other Indochina areas, situation changed little past week.

- A. Central Laos, Viet Minh avoiding major engagements.
- B. Southern Laos and northern Cambodia, four Viet Minh battalions collecting food, organizing bases preparation possible further advance southward.
- C. Assistant army attaché Saigon, after trip Cambodia last week, considered five Cambodian battalions invasion area adequate to meet threat and army under competent control defense minister.

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1. However, he criticized completely defensive mentality, poor tactical judgment Cambodian officers. They calling for more barbed wire, more machine pistols; one company 120 men at Kratie has entire strength in crowded rectangle 125 by 75 yards.

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